

EPISTLE TO YEMEN



THIS letter, described earlier as eloquent and philosophical, sensitive and empathetic, again reveals Maimonides as a resourceful pedagogue using literary skill, scientific knowledge, philosophical reasoning, and exegetical virtuosity in order to persuade his readers to remain steadfast in their faith. It not only is an example of medieval polemical literature but contains a philosophy of history as well.

The reader should pay special attention to the following:

(1) The phenomenology of persecutions of the Jews, the theory of suffering which is a constant of Jewish reality, and the promise of eternity which sustains this reality.

(2) The reliance upon special interpretation of Scripture, particularly the Book of Daniel.

(3) The summary of Maimonides' fundamental doctrine that all commandments in Judaism have an inner meaning designed to lead man to perfection.

(4) The notion that Christianity and Islam, Judaism's "daughter religions," are only surface imitations of Judaism.

(5) The refutation of the contention, frequently repeated by Muslim apologists, that Scripture has veiled allusions to Islam.

(6) The plea not to calculate the advent of the Messianic era

coupled with the recording of a family tradition which nevertheless suggests a date for this.

(7) The centrality of the problem of prophecy.

The thoughtful reader of this text will be in a position to gauge the stylistic and substantive transformations that occur when a philosopher becomes a polemicist and popularizer.



... You write that the rebel leader in Yemen decreed compulsory apostasy for the Jews by forcing the Jewish inhabitants of all the places he had subdued to desert the Jewish religion just as the Berbers had compelled them to do in Maghreb. Verily, this news has broken our backs and has astounded and dumbfounded the whole of our community. And rightly so. For these are evil tidings, "and whosoever hears of them, both his ears tingle" (I Sam. 3:11). Indeed our hearts are weakened, our minds are confused, and the powers of the body wasted because of the dire misfortunes which brought religious persecutions upon us from the two ends of the world, the East and the West, "so that the enemies were in the midst of Israel, some on this side, and some on that side" (Josh. 8:22). The prophet upon learning of such difficult and dreadful times prayed and interceded in our behalf, as we read, "Then said I, O Lord God, cease, I beseech You: how shall Jacob stand? for he is small" (Amos 7:5). Indeed, this is a subject which no religious man dare take lightly, nor any one who believes in Moses put aside. There can be no doubt that these are the Messianic travails concerning which the sages invoked God that they be spared seeing and experiencing them. Similarly the prophets trembled when they envisioned them as we learn from the words of Isaiah, "My heart pants, fearfulness frightens me, the twilight I have longed for has been turned for me into trembling" (Is. 21:4). Note also the divine exclamation in the Torah expressing sympathy for those who will experience them, as we read, "Alas, who shall live when God does this!" (Num. 24:23).

You write that the hearts of some people have turned away, uncertainty befalls them and their beliefs are weakened, while others have not lost faith nor have they become disquieted. Concerning this matter we have a divine premonition through Daniel who predicted

that the prolonged stay of Israel in the Diaspora, and the continuous persecutions will cause many to drift away from our faith, to have misgivings, or to go astray, because they witnessed our feebleness, and noted the triumph of our adversaries and their dominion over us, while others would neither oscillate in their belief, nor be shaken in their convictions. This may be gathered from the verse, "Many shall purify themselves, make themselves white, and be refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly, and none of the wicked shall understand; but they that are wise shall understand" (Dan. 12:10). Further on he foretells that even men of understanding and intelligence who would have brooked milder misfortunes and remained firm in their belief in God and in His servant Moses, will yield to distrust and will err, when they are visited by sterner and harsher afflictions, while only a few will remain pure in faith as we read, "And some of them that are wise shall stumble" (Dan. 11:35).

And now, my coreligionists, it is essential for you all to give attention and consideration to that which I am going to point out to you. You should impress it upon the minds of your women and children, so that their faith which may be enfeebled and impaired may be strengthened, and that they be re-established in an unceasing belief. May the Lord deliver us and you from religious doubt!

Remember, that ours is the true and authentic divine religion, revealed to us through Moses, the master of the former as well as the later prophets, by means of which God has distinguished us from the rest of mankind, as Scripture says, "Only the Lord had a delight in your fathers to love them and He chose their seed after them, even you above all peoples" (Deut. 10:15). This did not happen because of our merits, but rather as an act of divine grace, and on account of our forefathers who were cognizant of God and submitted to Him as we read, "The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people . . . but because the Lord loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers" (Deut. 7:7). God has made us unique by His laws and precepts, and our pre-eminence is manifested in His rules and statutes, as Scripture says, in narrating God's mercies to us, "And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" (Deut. 4:8). Therefore all the nations instigated by envy and impiety rose up against us, and all the kings of the earth motivated by injustice and enmity applied themselves to persecute us. They wanted to thwart

God, but He cannot be thwarted. Ever since the time of Revelation, every despot or slave that has attained to power, be he violent or ignoble, has made it his first aim and his final purpose to destroy our law, and to vitiate our religion, by means of the sword, by violence, or by brute force, such as Amalek, Sisera, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Titus, Hadrian, may their bones be ground to dust, and others like them. This is one of the two classes which attempt to foil the divine will.

The second class consists of the most intelligent and educated among the nations, such as the Syrians, Persians, and Greeks. These also endeavor to demolish our law and to vitiate it by means of arguments which they invent, and by means of controversies which they institute. They seek to render the Law ineffectual and to wipe out every trace thereof by means of their polemical writings, just as the despots plan to do it with the sword. But neither the one nor the other shall succeed. We possess the divine assurance given to Isaiah concerning any tyrant that will wish to undermine our Law and to annihilate it by weapons of war, that the Lord will demolish them so that they will have no effect. This is only a metaphorical way of saying that his efforts will be of no avail, and that he will not accomplish his purpose. In like manner whenever a disputant shall attempt to demonstrate the falsity of our Law, the Lord will shatter his arguments and prove them absurd, untenable, and ineffective. This divine promise is contained in the following verse, "No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment you shall condemn" (Is. 54:17).

Although the exponents of both methods persuade themselves that this is a structure which can be demolished, and they exert themselves to undermine its firmly established foundations, they only increase their pain and toil. The structure remains as firmly planted as ever, while the God of truth mocks and derides them, because they endeavor, with their feeble intelligence, to achieve a goal that is beyond the powers of mortal man. The inspired writer describes their attempt and God's scorn of them in the following verses: "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their words from us. He that sits in heaven laughs, the Lord has them in derision" (Ps. 2:3-4). Both of these parties have harassed and afflicted us incessantly throughout the epoch of our political independence, and partly during the period of our dispersion.

After that there arose a new sect which combined the two meth-

ods, namely, conquest and controversy, into one, because it believed that this procedure would be more effective in wiping out every trace of the Jewish nation and religion. It, therefore, resolved to lay claim to prophecy and to found a new faith, contrary to our divine religion, and to contend that it was equally God-given. Thereby it hoped to raise doubts and to create confusion, since one is opposed to the other and both supposedly emanate from a divine source, which would lead to the destruction of both religions. For such is the remarkable plan contrived by a man who is envious and querulous. He will strive to kill his enemy and to save his own life, but when he finds it impossible to attain his objective, he will devise a scheme whereby they both will be slain.

The first one to have adopted this plan was Jesus the Nazarene, may his bones be ground to dust. He was a Jew because his mother was a Jewess although his father was a Gentile. For in accordance with the principles of our law, a child born of a Jewess and a Gentile, or of a Jewess and a slave, is legitimate (*Yevamot 45a*). Jesus is only figuratively termed an illegitimate child. He impelled people to believe that he was a prophet sent by God to clarify perplexities in the Torah, and that he was the Messiah that was predicted by each and every seer. He interpreted the Torah and its precepts in such a fashion as to lead to their total annulment, to the abolition of all its commandments and to the violation of its prohibitions. The sages, of blessed memory, having become aware of his plans before his reputation spread among our people, meted out fitting punishment to him.

Daniel had already alluded to him when he presaged the downfall of a wicked one and a heretic among the Jews who would endeavor to destroy the Law, claim prophecy for himself, make pretenses to miracles, and allege that he is the Messiah, as it is written, "Also the children of the impudent among your people shall make bold to claim prophecy, but they shall fall" (*Dan. 11:14*).

Quite some time after, a religion appeared the origin of which is traced to him by the descendants of Esau, albeit it was not the intention of this person to establish a new faith. For he was innocuous to Israel as neither individual nor groups were unsettled in their beliefs because of him, since his inconsistencies were so transparent to every one. Finally he was overpowered and put a stop to by us when he fell into our hands, and his fate is well known.

After him arose the Madman who emulated his precursor since he paved the way for him. But he added the further objective of pro-

curing rule and submission, and he invented his well-known religion (Islam). All of these men purposed to place their teachings on the same level with our divine religion. But only a simpleton who lacks knowledge of both would liken divine institutions to human practices. Our religion differs as much from other religions for which there are alleged resemblances as a living man endowed with the faculty of reason is unlike a statue which is ever so well carved out of marble, wood, bronze or silver. When a person ignorant of divine wisdom or of God's works sees the statue that superficially resembles a man in its contours, form, features, and color, he believes that the structure of the parts of a statue is like the constitution of a man, because he is deficient in understanding concerning the inner organization of both. But the informed person who knows the interior of both, is cognizant of the fact that the internal structure of the statue betrays no skillful workmanship at all, whereas the inward parts of man are truly marvellously made, a testimony to the wisdom of the Creator, such as the prolongation of the nerves in the muscles and their ramifications, the branching out of the sinews and their intersections and the network of their ligaments and their manner of growth, the articulations of the bones and the joints, the pulsating and non-pulsating blood vessels and their ramifications, the setting of the limbs into one another, the uncovered and covered parts, every one of these in proportion in form and proper place.

Likewise a person ignorant of the secret meaning of Scripture ... and the deeper significance of the Law would be led to believe that our religion has something in common with another if he makes a comparison between the two. For he will note that in the Torah there are prohibitions and commandments, just as in other religions there are permitted and interdicted acts. Both contain a system of religious observances, positive and negative precepts, sanctioned by reward and punishment.

If he could only fathom the inner intent of the law, then he would realize that the essence of the true divine religion lies in the deeper meaning of its positive and negative precepts, every one of which will aid man in his striving after perfection, and remove every impediment to the attainment of excellence. These commands will enable the throng and the élite to acquire moral and intellectual qualities, each according to his ability. Thus the godly community becomes pre-eminent, reaching a twofold perfection. By the first perfection I mean, man's spending his life in this world under the most

agreeable and congenial conditions. The second perfection would constitute the achievement of intellectual objectives, each in accordance with his native powers.

The tenets of the other religions which resemble those of Scripture have no deeper meaning, but are superficial imitations, copied from and patterned after it. They modelled their religions upon ours in order to glorify themselves, and indulge the fancy that they are similar to so and so. However, their counterfeiting is an open secret to the learned. Consequently they became objects of derision and ridicule just as one laughs and smiles at an ape when it imitates the actions of men.

This event was predicted in the divinely inspired prophecy of Daniel, according to which, in some future time a person would appear with a religion similar to the true one, with a book of Scriptures and oral communications, who will arrogantly pretend that God had vouchsafed him a revelation, and that he held converse with Him, besides making other extravagant claims. Thus Daniel in his description of the rise of the Arabic kingdom after the fall of the Roman Empire, alluded to the appearance of the Madman and his victories over the Roman, Persian, and Byzantine Empires in the vision concerning a horn which grew, became long and strong. This is clearly indicated in a verse that can be understood by the masses as well as by the select few. Since this interpretation is borne out by the facts of history, no other meaning can be given to the following verse: "I considered the horns, and, behold, there came among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots; and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things" (Dan. 7:8).

Now consider how remarkably apt the symbolism is. Daniel says that he saw a small horn that was going up. When it became longer, even marvellously longer, it cast down before it three horns and, behold, in the side of the horn there were two eyes similar to the two eyes of man, and a mouth speaking wanton words. This obviously alludes to the person who will found a new religion similar to the divine law, and make claims to a revelation of a Scripture, and to prophecy. He will, furthermore, endeavor to alter and abolish the Law, as it is said, "And he shall seek to change the seasons and the law" (Dan. 7:25).

Daniel was divinely informed that He would destroy this person notwithstanding his greatness and his long endurance together with

the remaining adherents of his predecessors. For the three parties that warred against us will ultimately perish, i.e., the one that sought to overpower us with the sword, the second which strove to conquer us by arguments, as well the third that founded a religion similar to ours.

Though they shall appear to be triumphant for a while, and be in the ascendancy for a longer or shorter period of time, they shall not last nor endure. We have a divine assurance from time immemorial that whenever a decree of apostasy is passed against us, God will ultimately terminate it. When King David inspired by the Holy Spirit and speaking in the name of the community reflected, how many peoples ruled over Israel in the past, and how many trials and tribulations they had undergone from the beginning of their history, and nevertheless were not exterminated, he was moved to exclaim, "Much have they afflicted me from my youth up; but they have not prevailed against me" (Ps. 129:2).

My brethren, you all know that in the time of Nebuchadnezzar the Wicked, the Jews were compelled to worship idols and none was spared save Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Ultimately God destroyed Nebuchadnezzar, and put an end to his laws, and the religion of truth came back to its own.

Similarly during the Second Commonwealth when the wicked Greek rulers gained control of Palestine, they instituted severe persecutions against Israel in order to abolish the Torah. The Jews were compelled to profane the Sabbath, and were forbidden to observe the rite of circumcision. Every Jew was forced to write on his garment the words, "We have no portion in the Lord God of Israel," and also to engrave this sentence on the horns of his ox and then plough with it. This state of affairs lasted about fifty-two years. Finally, God brought to an end simultaneously their empire and their laws.

The sages, of blessed memory, frequently allude to persecutions in the following manner: "once the wicked government passed the following decree of persecution," or, "they decreed so and so." After a while God would make the decree null and void by destroying the power which issued it. It was this observation that led the rabbis, of blessed memory, to affirm that persecutions are of short duration (Ketuvot 3b).

The divine assurance was given to Jacob our father that his descendants would survive the people who degraded and discomfited them as it is written: "And your seed shall be like the dust of the

earth" (Gen. 28:14). That is to say, although his offspring will be abased like dust that is trodden under foot, they will ultimately emerge triumphant and victorious, and as the simile implies, just as the dust settles finally upon him who tramples upon it and remains after him, so shall Israel outlive its persecutors.*

The prophet Isaiah has long ago predicted that various peoples will succeed in vanquishing Israel and lording over them for some time. But that ultimately God will come to Israel's assistance and will put a stop to their woes and affliction as is suggested in the following verse: "A grievous vision is declared to me; the treacherous one will deal treacherously, and the spoiler will spoil; Go up O Elam, besiege O Media! but ultimately the sighing thereof I shall make to cease" (Is. 21:2).

We are in possession of the divine assurance that Israel is indestructible and imperishable, and will always continue to be a pre-eminent community. As it is impossible for God to cease to exist, so is Israel's destruction and disappearance from the world unthinkable, as we read, "For I the Lord change not, and you, O sons of Jacob, will not be consumed" (Mal. 3:6). Similarly He has avowed and assured us that it is unimaginable that He will reject us entirely even if we disobey Him, and disregard His behests, as the prophet Jeremiah avers, "Thus says the Lord: If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, then will I also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, says the Lord" (Jer. 31:36). Indeed this very promise has already been given before through Moses our Teacher who says, "And yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God" (Lev. 26:44).

Put your trust in the true promises of Scripture, brethren, and be not dismayed at the series of persecutions or the enemy's ascendancy over us, or the weakness of our people. These trials are designed to test and purify us so that only the saints and the pious ones of the pure and undefiled lineage of Jacob will adhere to our religion and remain within the fold, as it is written, "And among the remnant are those whom the Lord shall call" (Joel 3:5). This verse makes it clear that they are not numerous, being the descendants of those who were present on Mount Sinai, witnessed the divine Revela-

*See *Mishneh Torah*, Book V, Forbidden Intercourse, ch. XIV.

tion, entered into the covenant of God, and undertook to do and obey as is signified in their saying, "We will do and obey" (Ex. 24:7). They obligated not only themselves but also their descendants, as it is written, "To us and to our children forever" (Deut. 29:28). We have been given adequate divine assurance that not only did all the persons who were present at the Sinaitic Revelation believe in the prophecy of Moses and in his Law, but that their descendants likewise would do so, until the end of time, as it is written, "Lo, I come to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever" (Ex. 10:9).

Consequently it is manifest that he who spurns the religion that was revealed at that theophany is not an offspring of the folk who witnessed it. For our sages, of blessed memory, have insisted that they who entertain scruples concerning the divine message are not scions of the race that were present on Mount Sinai (*Nedarim* 20a). May God guard us and you from doubt, and banish from our midst confusion and suspicion which lead to it.

Now, my coreligionists in the Diaspora, it behooves you to hearten one another, the elders to guide the youth, and the leaders to direct the masses. Give your assent to the truth that is immutable and unchangeable, and to the following postulates of a religion that shall never fail. God is one in a unique sense of the term, and Moses is His prophet and spokesman, and the greatest and most perfect of the seers. To him was vouchsafed by God what has never been vouchsafed to any prophet before him, nor will it be in the future. The entire Torah was divinely revealed to Moses of whom it was said, "With him do I speak mouth to mouth" (Num. 12:8). It will neither be abrogated nor superseded, neither supplemented nor abridged. Never shall it be supplanted by another divine revelation containing positive and negative duties. Keep well in mind the Revelation on Sinai in accordance with the divine precept to perpetuate the memory of this occasion and not to allow it to fall into oblivion. Furthermore, we were enjoined to impress this event upon the minds of our children, as it is written, "Only take heed to yourself, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes saw, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your children and your children's children" (Deut. 4:9).

It is imperative, my fellow Jews, that you make this great spectacle of the Revelation appeal to the imagination of your children. Pro-

claim at public gatherings its momentousness. For this event is the pivot of our religion, and the proof which demonstrates its veracity. Evaluate this phenomenon at its true importance, for Scripture has pointed out its significance in the verse, "For ask now of the days past, which were before you since the day that God created man upon the earth, and from the one end of heaven to the other, whether there has been any such thing as this great thing is, or has been heard like it?" (Deut. 4:32).

Remember, my coreligionists, that this great, incomparable, and unique historical event is attested by the best of evidence. For never before or since, has a whole nation witnessed a revelation from God or beheld His splendor. The purpose of all this was to confirm us in the faith so that nothing can change it, and to reach a degree of certainty which will sustain us in these trying times of fierce persecution and absolute tyranny, as it is written, "For God is come to test you" (Ex. 20:17). Scripture means that God revealed Himself to you thus in order to give you strength to withstand all future trials. Now do not slip nor err, be steadfast in your religion and persevere in your faith and its duties.

Solomon, of blessed memory, has compared our people to a beautiful woman with a perfect figure, marred by no defect, in the verse, "You are all fair, my love; and there is no spot in you" (Song of Songs 4:7). On the other hand, he depicted the adherents of other religions and faiths, who strive to entice and win us over to their convictions, as courtesans who lure virtuous women for lewd purposes. Similarly they seek devices to trap us into embracing their religions, and subscribing to their doctrines. To these who endeavor to decoy her into avowing the superiority of their creed, our nation deftly replies, "Why do you take hold of me, can you confer upon me something like the felicity of the two companies?" She reasons thus, "If you can furnish us with something like the Revelation on Sinai, in which the camp of Israel faced the camp of the Divine Presence, then we shall espouse your doctrines." This is metaphorically expressed in the verse, "Return, return, O Shulammite; return, return, that we may look upon you. What will you see in the Shulammite? As it were a dance of two companies" (*ibid.* 7:1). Now "Shulammite" signifies the perfect one; "A dance of the two companies" alludes to the joy of the theophany in Mount Sinai in which both the camp of Israel and the camp of God showed as is intimated in the two following verses: "Moses brought forth the people out of

the camp to meet God" (Ex. 19:17), and "The chariots of God are myriads, even thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in holiness" (Ps. 68:18).

Note well the apt imagery and the deeper significance of the aforementioned verse. The fourfold occurrence of the word "return" is an allusion to the four empires, each of which will endeavor to coerce us to abandon our faith and embrace theirs. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that we are now living under the aegis of the Fourth Empire. A prediction to this effect is found in the Torah, that our enemies will force us to accept their faith, for we read, "And there shall you serve gods, the work of men's hands" (Deut. 4:28). However, it will not be general throughout the world and God will never deprive us of His Law. As He assured us saying: "For it shall not be forgotten from the mouth of his seed" (*ibid.* 31:21). Indeed, Isaiah, the herald of the national redemption, has already stated that Israel's indestructibility is the result of a divine pact betokened by the perpetuation of the Torah in our midst, and our devotion to its tenets and teachings, as he says, "And as for Me, this is My covenant with them, says the Lord; My spirit that is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, nor out of the mouth of your seed, nor out of the mouth of your seed's seed, says the Lord, from henceforth and for ever" (Is. 59:21).

Our nation speaks with pride of the virulent oppression it has suffered, and the sore tribulations it has endured, to quote the words of the psalmist, "Nay, but for Your sake are we killed all the day" (Ps. 44:23). The rabbis, of blessed memory, remark that the verse "Nay, but for Your sake" alludes to the generation that undergoes persecution (*Midrash Song of Songs* 1:3). Let those persons exalt who suffered dire misfortunes, were deprived of their riches, forced into exile and lost their belongings. For the bearing of these hardships is a source of glory and a great achievement in the sight of God. Whoever is visited by these calamities is like a burnt offering upon the altar. We may apply in commendation the verse to them, "Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord, that He may also bestow upon you a blessing this day" (Ex. 32:29).

It behooves the victim for the sake of his religion to escape and flee to the desert and wilderness, and not to consider separation from family or loss of wealth. For they are a slight sacrifice and a paltry offering due to God, King of kings, possessor of all things, the Lord your God, whose Name is glorious and awesome. God may be

trusted to compensate you well in this world and in the world to come.

We have noted that godly and pious folk who are animated by a desire to get acquainted with the truth and those who are engaged in its pursuit, rush to the divine religion and wend their way from the most distant parts to the homes of scholars. They seek to gain increased insight into the law with the concomitant hope that God will amply reward them. How much more is it one's duty to go into exile, if the question of observing the whole Torah is at stake.

When a man finds it arduous to gain a livelihood in one country he emigrates to another. All the more is it incumbent upon a Jew who is restricted in the practice of his religion to depart for another place. If he finds it impossible to leave that locality for the time being, he must not become careless and indulge with abandon in the desecration of the Sabbath and the dietary laws on the assumption that he is exempt from all religious obligations. It is the eternally inescapable duty of everyone belonging to the stock of Jacob to abide by the Law. Nay, he exposes himself to punishment for the violation of each and every positive or negative precept. Let no man conclude that he may freely disregard the less important ceremonies without liability to penalty because he has committed under duress some major sins. For Jeroboam, son of Nebat, may his bones be ground to dust, was chastised not only for the sin of worshiping the calves and inciting Israel to do the same, but also for his failure to construct a booth on the Feast of Tabernacles. This is one of the fundamental principles of our religion. Understand it aright, teach it, and apply the principle widely.

In your letter you mention that the apostle has spurred on a number of people to believe that several verses in Scripture allude to the Madman, such as "bimeod meod" (Gen. 17:20); "He shined forth from Mount Paran" (Deut. 33:2); "A prophet from the midst of you" (Deut. 18:15); and the promise to Ishmael, "I will make him a great nation" (Gen. 17:20). These arguments have been rehearsed so often that they have become nauseating. It is not enough to declare that they are altogether feeble; nay, to cite as proofs these verses is ridiculous and absurd in the extreme. For these are not matters that can confuse the minds of anyone. Neither the Their purpose in citing these verses is to win favor in the eyes of the untutored multitude nor the apostates themselves who delude others with them, believe in them or entertain any illusions about them.

Gentiles by demonstrating that they believe the statement of the Koran that Mohammed was mentioned in the Torah. But the Muslims themselves put no faith in their arguments, they neither accept nor cite them, because they are manifestly so fallacious. Inasmuch as the Muslims could not find a single proof in the entire Bible nor a reference or possible allusion to their prophet which they could utilize, they were compelled to accuse us saying, "You have altered the text of the Torah, and expunged every trace of the name of Mohammed therefrom." They could find nothing stronger than this ignominious argument the falsity of which is easily demonstrated to one and all by the following facts. First, Scripture was translated into Syriac, Greek, Persian, and Latin hundreds of years before the appearance of Mohammed. Second, there is a uniform tradition as to the text of the Bible both in the East and the West, with the result that no differences in the text exist at all, not even in the vocalization, for they are all correct. Nor do any differences affecting the meaning exist. The motive for their accusation lies, therefore, in the absence of any allusion to Mohammed in the Torah....

In your letter you have adverted to the computations of the date of the Redemption and R. Saadiah's opinion on the subject. First of all, it devolves upon you to know that no human being will ever be able to determine it precisely as Daniel has already intimated, "For the words are shut up and sealed" (Dan. 12:9). Indeed, many hypotheses were advanced by scholars, who fancied that they have discovered the date, as was anticipated in Scripture, "Many will run to and fro, and opinions shall be increased" (*ibid.*). That is, there shall be numerous views concerning it. Furthermore, we have a divine communication through the medium of the prophets that many persons will calculate the time of the advent of the Messiah but will fail to ascertain its true date. We are cautioned against giving way to doubt and distrust because of these miscalculations. The longer the delay, the more fervently shall you hope, as it is written, "And it declares of the end and does not lie, though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not delay" (Hab. 2:3).

Remember that even the date of the termination of the Egyptian exile was not precisely known and gave rise to differences of opinion, although its duration was fixed in Scripture, where we read, "And they shall serve them and afflict them four hundred years" (Gen. 15:13). Some reckoned the period of four hundred years from the time of Jacob's arrival in Egypt, others dated it from the begin-

ning of Israel's bondage, which happened seventy years later, while still others computed it from the time of the Covenant of the Pieces when this matter was divinely predicted to Abraham. At the expiration of four hundred years after this event, and thirty years before the appearance of Moses, a band of Israelites left Egypt because they believed that exile had ended for them. They were subdued and slain by the Egyptians. The lot of the Israelites who remained was consequently aggravated as we learn from our sages, the teachers of our national traditions. David already alluded to the vanquished Israelites who miscalculated the date of the redemption in the verse, "The children of Ephraim were as archers handling the bow that turned back in the day of battle" (Ps. 78:9).

In truth, the period of four hundred years commences with the birth of Isaac, the seed of Abraham, par excellence, as may be gathered from the verse, "For in Isaac shall seed be called to you" (Gen. 21:12), and the verse, "Your seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, they shall serve them and afflict them four hundred years" (*ibid.* 15:13). In exile, they would rule, enslave, and maltreat them, this is the implication of this text. The four hundred years mentioned in this verse refer to the duration of the exile, and not (solely) to the Egyptian bondage. This fact was misunderstood until the great prophet (Moses) came, when it was realized that the four hundred years dates back precisely to the birth of Isaac. Now, if so much uncertainty prevailed in regard to the date of the emancipation from the Egyptian bondage, the term of which was fixed, how much more would it be the case in respect to the date of the final redemption, the prolonged and protracted duration of which appalled and dismayed our inspired seers, so that one of them was moved to exclaim, "Will You be angry with us forever? Will You draw out Your anger to all generations?" (Ps. 85:6). Isaiah, too, alluding to the long drawn out exile, declared: "And they shall be gathered together as prisoners and gathered in the dungeon, and shall be shut up in prison, and after many days shall they be released" (Is. 24:22). Inasmuch as Daniel has proclaimed the matter a deep secret, our sages have interdicted the calculation of the time of the future redemption, or the reckoning of the period of the advent of the Messiah, because the masses might be mystified and bewildered should the Messiah fail to appear as forecast. The rabbis invoked God to frustrate and destroy those who seek to determine precisely the advent of the Messianic era, because they are a stumbling block to the

people, and that is why they uttered the imprecation "May the calculators of the final redemption come to grief" (*Sanhedrin* 97b).

As for R. Saadiah's Messianic calculations, there are extenuating circumstances for them though he knew they were disallowed. For the Jews of his time were perplexed and misguided. The divine religion might well nigh have disappeared had he not encouraged the pusillanimous, and diffused, disseminated, and propagated by word of mouth and pen a knowledge of its underlying principles. He believed, in all earnestness, that by means of the Messianic calculations, he would inspire the masses with hope for the truth. Verily all his deeds were for the sake of heaven. Consequently, in view of the probity of his motives which we have disclosed, one must not decry him for his Messianic computations.

I note that you are inclined to believe in astrology* and in the influence of the past and future conjunctions of the planets upon human affairs. You should dismiss such notions from your thoughts. Cleanse your mind as one cleanses dirty clothes. Accomplished scholars, whether they are religious or not, refuse to believe in the truth of this science. Its postulates can be refuted by real proofs on rational grounds. But this is not the place to enter into a discussion of them. Mark well, however, what Scripture has to say about the astrologers. At the time when Moses rose to leadership the astrologers had unanimously predicted that our nation would never be freed from bondage nor gain its independence, but fortune smiled upon Israel, for the most exquisite of human beings appeared and redeemed them at the very time which was supposedly most inauspicious for them. Furthermore, Egypt was smitten with the plagues at the very time for which the astrologers foretold an epoch of wholesome climate, abundance, and prosperity for its inhabitants. To the failure of their vaticination, Isaiah alludes when he says, "Where are they then your wise men? And let them tell you now, and let them know what the Lord of hosts has purposed concerning Egypt" (*Is. 19:12*).

Similarly the pundits, astrologers, and prognosticators were all of one mind that the administration of Nebuchadnezzar, the wicked, marked the beginning of an era of enduring prosperity. Indeed, his dynasty was extinguished and destroyed, as was divinely forecast by Isaiah. He derided them for pretending to foreknowledge, and held

*See Letter on Astrology.

up to scorn the state which fancied itself in possession of sapient folk versed in futurity, as we read, "Let now the astrologers, the star-gazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up and save you" (Is. 47:13).

They are likewise wrong in their predictions concerning the era of the Messiah, may he speedily come. For while the Gentiles believe that our nation will never constitute an independent state, nor will they even rise above their present condition, and all the astrologers, diviners, and augurs concur in this opinion, God will prove false their views and beliefs, and will order the advent of the Messiah. Again, it is Isaiah who makes reference to this event in the verse: "That frustrate the tokens of the impostors, and makes the diviners mad; that turns wise men backward, and makes their knowledge foolish; that confirms the word of His servant, and performs the counsel of His messengers; that says of Jerusalem, 'She shall be inhabited'; and of the cities of Judah, 'They shall be built, and I will raise up the waste places thereof'" (Is. 44:25-26). This is the correct view that every Israelite should hold, without paying any attention to the conjunctions of the stars, of greater or smaller magnitude.

I have observed your statement that science is little cultivated, and that learning does not flourish in your country, which you attribute to the influence of the conjunctions in the earthly trigon. Remember that this low state of learning and science is not peculiar to your country, but is widely prevalent in Israel today. Indeed, a divine premonition of such a state of affairs is contained in a verse in Isaiah which reads, "Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work, and a wonder, and the wisdom of the wise men shall perish, and the prudence of the prudent men shall be hid" (Is. 29:14).

This condition is not due to the earthly or fiery trigon, as is proven by the fact that Solomon, king of Israel, lived during the earthly trigon, and yet Scripture testifies that "He was wiser than all men" (I Kings 5:11). So did Abraham, of blessed memory, who was designated the Pillar of the World, discovered the First Cause of the entire universe, and demonstrated the central importance of the principle of the Unity of God for all mankind. He, Isaac, and Jacob, all three of them, carry the throne of glory in their hearts, to make use of a rabbinical metaphor, "The patriarchs are the chariots" (Gen. Rabbah 82:7), which in turn was suggested by the verse, "And God

rose up over him" (Gen. 35:13). The meaning is that they have attained a true conception of the Deity. Now the three patriarchs lived during the earthly trigon.

This matter will become clear if the following facts are borne in mind. There is, first, the smaller conjunction, that is, the meeting of Saturn with Jupiter, which occurs once in approximately twenty solar years. These conjunctions continue to take place twelve times within the same trigon, covering a period of two hundred and forty years. Then conjunctions take place in the second trigon, which occur every two hundred and forty solar years. The shift to the next trigon is known as the medium conjunction. According to this calculation an interval of nine hundred and sixty years will elapse between the first and second meeting of two planets in the same point of the Zodiac. This is termed the great conjunction, and occurs once in nine hundred and sixty years. This is the time that must elapse between the first and second meeting of Saturn and Jupiter in the same degree of Aries. If you will calculate back, you will understand my statement above that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as well as David lived during the earthly trigon. My purpose in going into details was to dispel any suspicion of yours that the trigon exercises any influence upon human affairs.

Furthermore, you write that some people have calculated the forthcoming conjunction and have determined that all the seven planets will meet in one of the constellations of the Zodiac. This forecast is untrue, for no meeting of the seven planets will occur in the next conjunction, nor in the following ones. For such an event will not happen even in ten thousand years, as is well known to those who are familiar with the astronomical law of equation. Verily this is the calculation of an ignorant person, as is evinced by other remarks of his, quoted by you, to the effect that there will be a deluge of air and of dust. It is essential for you to know that these and similar assertions are fabricated and mendacious. Do not consider a statement true because you find it in a book, for the prevaricator is as little restrained with his pen as with his tongue. For the untutored and uninstructed are convinced of the veracity of a statement by the mere fact that it is written; nevertheless its accuracy must be demonstrated in another manner.

Remember that a blind person submits to an individual having power of sight for intelligent direction knowing that he lacks the vision to guide himself safely; and an ailing person, unskilled in the

art of medicine, and uninformed as to matters detrimental to or beneficial for his health, defers to a physician for guidance and obeys him implicitly. Just so is it indispensable for the laity to yield unwaveringly to the prophets, who were men of true insight, and to confide in them in respect to matters affecting the truth or the error of a given teaching. Next in importance are the sages who have studied day and night the dogmas and doctrines of our faith and have learned to distinguish between the genuine and the spurious.

After this exposition you may trust me that the statements you have previously quoted are inaccurate and this applies equally to similar views which you heard expressed in conversation or met with in books. For the author of such sayings is either ignorant, a mountebank, or seeks to destroy the law and to demolish its bulwarks. Do you perceive the brazenness of these people who assert that there will be a deluge of air, and dust, and fire, in order to deceive and delude others to believe that the Deluge in the time of Noah was merely due to a concentration of water, and was not a divine punishment for the immorality of the time, as is explicitly stated in Scripture that guides us against error and fallacy. Similarly, Sodom and the other cities were not destroyed because of the unbelief and wickedness of their inhabitants in direct contradiction to the Bible which says, "I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it which is come to Me" (Gen. 18:21). Thus whatever happens in this world through divine intervention, they say is the inevitable consequence of the planetary conjunctions.

They have affirmed the truth of their propositions in order to undermine the principles of our religion, and to give free reign to their animal instincts and passions as do the beasts and the ostriches. We were divinely admonished against those views in Scripture to the following effect: If you rebel against Me so that I bring disaster upon you as a punishment for your misdeeds, but you ascribe your reverses to chance rather than to your guilt, then shall I increase your afflictions and make them more grievous. This is the intent of the verse in the Chapter of Admonition: "If you will walk with Me bekeri, I, too, shall walk with you in the wrath of keri" (Lev. 26:27-28).* Now "keri" signifies chance, hazard. Scripture means to say: If you regard My chastisement as a fortuitous event, then shall I bring the most severe calamities upon you "sevenfold for your sins" (*ibid.* 26:28).

*See *Mishneh Torah*, Book III, Fast Days, ch. I.

These foregoing remarks have made it abundantly clear that the advent of the Messiah is in no way subject to the influence of the stars.

Indeed one of our keen minds in the province of Andalusia calculated by means of astrology the date of the final redemption and predicted the coming of the Messiah in a particular year. Every one of our distinguished scholars made little of his declaration, discounted what he did and censured him sharply for it. But grim fate dealt with him more sternly than we could have. For at the very time when the Messiah was supposed to arrive, a rebel leader appeared in Maghreb who issued an order of conversion as you are well aware. The event proved to be a great debacle for the partisans of this prognosticator. Indeed, the hardships experienced by our people in the Diaspora are responsible for these extravagances, for a drowning man catches at a straw.

Therefore, my coreligionists, "be strong and let your heart take courage, all you that wait for the Lord" (Ps. 31:25). Strengthen one another, affirm your faith in the Expected One, may he speedily appear in your midst. "Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the tottering knees" (Is. 35:3). Remember! Isaiah, the herald of Israel's redemption, predicted that the prolongation of the adversities of exile will impel many of our people to believe that God has relinquished and abandoned us (far be it from Him), as we read "But Zion said: 'The Lord has forsaken me, and the Lord has forgotten me'" (*ibid.* 49:14). But he was given the divine assurance that such is not the case, to quote the following, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, these may forget, yet I will not forget you" (*ibid.* 49:15). In truth, this divine promise had already been divulged by the first prophet, who declared: "For the Lord your God is a merciful God. He will not fail you, neither destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them" (Deut. 4:31). "Then the Lord your God will turn your captivity and have compassion on you, and will return and gather you from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you" (*ibid.* 30:3).

It is, my coreligionists, one of the fundamental articles of the faith of Israel, that the future redeemer of our people will spring only from the stock of Solomon, son of David. He will gather our nation, assemble our exiles, redeem us from our degradation, propagate the true religion, and exterminate his opponents as is clearly stated in

Scripture, "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not nigh; there shall step forth a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall arise out of Israel. And shall smite through the corners of Moab, and break down all the sons of Seth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also, even his enemies, shall be a possession, while Israel does valiantly" (Num. 24:17-18). He will be sent by God at a time of great catastrophe and dire misfortune for Israel as was predicted in the verse, "There will be none remaining, shut up or left at large" (Deut. 32:36). And when he appears, he will fulfill the promises made in his behalf. A later prophet, too, was alluding to the Messianic tribulations when he declared, "But who can endure the day of his coming" (Mal. 3:2). This is the proper understanding of this article of faith. . . .*

Remember, my coreligionists, that on account of the vast number of our sins, God has hurled us in the midst of this people, the Arabs, who have persecuted us severely, and passed baneful and discriminatory legislation against us, as Scripture has forewarned us, "Our enemies themselves shall judge us" (Deut. 32:31). Never did a nation molest, degrade, debase, and hate us as much as they. Therefore when David, of blessed memory, inspired by the holy spirit, envisaged the future tribulations of Israel, he bewailed and lamented their lot only in the Kingdom of Ishmael, and prayed in their behalf, for their deliverance, as is implied in the verse, "Woe is me, that I sojourn with Meshech, that I dwell beside the tents of Kedar" (Ps. 120:5). Note the distinction between Kedar and the children of Ishmael, for the Madman and imbecile is of the lineage of the children of Kedar as they readily admit. Daniel alludes only to our humiliation and degradation "like the dust in threshing" suffered at the hands of the Arabs, may they speedily be vanquished, when he says, "And some of the host and of the stars it cast down to the ground, and trampled upon them" (Dan. 8:10). Although we were dishonored by them beyond human endurance, and had to put up with their fabrications, yet we behaved like him who is depicted by the inspired writer, "But I am as a deaf man, I hear not, and I am as a dumb man that opens not his mouth" (Ps. 38:14). Similarly our sages instructed us to bear the prevarications and preposterousness of Ishmael in silence. They found a cryptic allusion for this attitude in the names of his sons "Mishma, Dumah, and Massa" (Gen. 25:14),

*See *Mishneh Torah*, Book XIV, Kings, chs. XI-XII.

which was interpreted to mean, "Listen, be silent, and endure" (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, *ad locum*). We have acquiesced, both old and young, to inure ourselves to humiliation, as Isaiah instructed us, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair" (Is. 50:6). All this notwithstanding, we do not escape this continued maltreatment which well nigh crushes us. No matter how much we suffer and elect to remain at peace with them, they stir up strife and sedition, as David predicted, "I am all peace, but when I speak, they are for war" (Ps. 120:7). If, therefore, we start trouble and claim power from them absurdly and preposterously we certainly give ourselves up to destruction.

I shall now narrate to you succinctly several episodes subsequent to the rise of the Arabic kingdom, from which you will derive some benefit. One of these refers to the exodus of a multitude of Jews, numbering hundreds of thousands, from the East beyond Ispahan, led by an individual who pretended to be the Messiah. They were accou-tered with military equipment, and drawn swords, and slew all those that encountered them. They reached, according to the information I received, the vicinity of Baghdad. This happened in the beginning of the reign of the Umayyads.

The king then said to all the Jews of his kingdom: "Let your scholars go out to meet this multitude and ascertain whether their pretension is true and he is unmistakably your Expected One. If so, we shall conclude peace with you under any conditions you may prefer. But if it is dissimulation, then I shall wage war against them." When the sages met these Jews, the latter declared: "We belong to the children of the district beyond the river." Then they asked them: "Who instigated you to make this uprising?" Whereupon they replied: "This man here, one of the descendants of David, whom we know to be pious and virtuous. This man, whom we knew to be a leper at night, arose the following morning healthy and sound." They believed that leprosy was one of the characteristics of the Mes-siah, for they found an allusion to the verse: "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted" (Is. 53:4), that is by leprosy. Whereupon the sages explained to them that this interpretation was incorrect, and that he lacked even one of the characteristics of the Messiah, let alone all of them. Furthermore, they advised them as follows: "O brethren, you are still near your native country and have the possibil-ity of returning there. If you remain in this land you will not only perish, but also undermine the teachings of Moses, by misleading

people to believe that the Messiah has appeared and has been vanquished, whereas you have neither a prophet in your midst, nor an omen betokening his coming." Thereupon they were persuaded by these arguments. The Sultan turned over to them so and so many thousand of denars by way of hospitality in order that they should leave his country. But after they had returned home, he had a change of heart with respect to the Jews upon whom he imposed a fine for his expenditures. He ordered them to make a special mark on their garments, the writing of the word "cursed," and to attach one iron bar in the back and one in the front. Ever since then the communities of Khorasan and Ispahan experienced the tribulations of the Diaspora. This episode we have learned from oral reports.

The following incident we have verified and know to be true because it occurred in recent times. About fifty years ago or less, a pious and virtuous man and scholar by the name of Moses Al-Dari came from Dara to the province of Andalusia to study under Rabbi Joseph ha-Levi, of blessed memory, Ibn Migash, of whom you very likely have heard. Later he left for Fez, the center of Maghreb. People flocked to him because of his piety, virtue, and learning. He informed them that the Messiah had come, as was divinely revealed to him in a dream. Yet he did not pretend on the basis of a divine communication, as did the former lunatic, that he was the Messiah. He merely affirmed that the Messiah had appeared. Many people became his adherents and reposed faith in him. My father and master, of blessed memory, endeavored to dissuade and discourage people from following him. However only a few were influenced by my father, while most, nay, nearly all clung to R. Moses, of blessed memory. Finally, he predicted events which came true no matter what was going to occur. He would say: "I was informed yesterday—this and this would happen," and it did happen exactly as he foretold. Once he forecast a vehement rain for the coming Friday and that the falling drops would be blood. This was considered a sign of the approaching advent of the Messiah, as was inferred from the verse, "And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood and fire, and pillars of smoke" (Joel 3:3). This episode took place in the month of Marheshvan. A very heavy rain fell that Friday and the fluid that descended was red and viscous as if it were mixed with clay. This miracle convinced all the people that he was undoubtedly a prophet. In itself this occurrence is not inconsistent with the tenets of the Torah, for prophecy will return to Israel before

the Messianic advent, as I have previously explained. When the majority of the people put their trust in him, he predicted that the Messiah would come that very year on Passover eve. He advised the people to sell their property and contract debts to the Muslims with the promise to pay back ten denars for one, in order to observe the precepts of the Torah in connection with the Passover festival, for they would never see them again, and so they did. When Passover came and nothing transpired, the people were ruined as most of them had disposed of their property for a trifling sum, and were overwhelmed with debt. When the Gentiles in the vicinity and their serfs learned of this hoax they were minded to do away with him, had they located him. As this Muslim country no longer offered him protection he left for Palestine where he died, may his memory be blessed. When he left he made predictions, as I was informed by those who saw him, concerning events both great and little in Maghreb which were later fulfilled.

My father, of blessed memory, told me that about fifteen or twenty years before that episode, there lived respectable folk in Cordova, the center of Andalusia, some of whom were given to the cult of astrology. They were all of one mind that the Messiah would appear that year. They sought a revelation in a dream night after night, and ascertained that the Messiah was a man of that city. They picked a pious and virtuous person by the name of Ibn Aryeh who had been instructing the people. They wrought miracles and made predictions just as Al-Dari did until they won over the hearts of all the people. When the influential and learned men of our community heard of this, they assembled in the synagogue and had Ibn Aryeh brought there and had him flogged in public. Furthermore, they imposed a fine upon him and put him into the ban, because he gave assent by his silence to the professions of his adherents instead of restraining them and pointing out to them that they contradict our religion. They did the same thing to the persons who assembled about him. The Jews escaped the wrath of the Gentiles only with the greatest difficulty.

About forty years preceding the affair of Ibn Aryeh in Andalusia, there appeared a man in Linon, a large center in the heart of France, which numbered more than ten thousand Jewish families. He pretended that he was the Messiah. He was supposed to have performed the following miracle: On moonlit nights he would go out and climb to the top of high trees in the field and glide from tree to tree like a

bird. He cited a verse from Daniel to prove that such a miracle was within the power of the Messiah: "And behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like a son of man . . . and there was given him dominion" (Dan. 7:13-14). Many who witnessed the miracle became his votaries. The French discovered this, pillaged and put many of his followers to death, together with the pretender. Some of them maintain, however, that he is still in hiding until this very day.

The prophets have predicted and instructed us, as I have told you, that pretenders and simulators will appear in great numbers at the time when the advent of the true Messiah will draw nigh, but they will not be able to make good their claim. They will perish with many of their partisans.

Solomon, of blessed memory, inspired by the holy spirit, foresaw that the prolonged duration of the exile would incite some of our people to seek to terminate it before the appointed time, and as a consequence they would perish or meet with disaster. Therefore he admonished and adjured them in metaphorical language to desist, as we read, "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and by the hinds of the field, that you awaken not, nor stir up love, until it please" (Song of Songs 2:7, 8:4). Now, brethren and friends, abide by the oath, and stir not up love until it please (Ketuvot 111a).

May God, who created the world with the attributes of mercy, grant us the privilege to behold the return of the exiles, to the portion of His inheritance, to contemplate the graciousness of the Lord, and to visit early in His Temple. May He take us out from the Valley of the Shadow of Death wherein He put us. May He remove darkness from our eyes, and gloom from our hearts. May He fulfill in our days as well as yours the prophecy contained in the verse, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light" (Is. 9:1). May He darken our opponents in His anger and wrath, may He illuminate our obscurity, as it is written, "For behold, darkness shall cover the earth . . . but upon you the Lord will shine" (Is. 60:2). Greetings to you, my dear friend, master of the sciences, and paragon of learning, and to our erudite colleagues, and to all the rest of the people. Peace, peace, as the light that shines, and much peace until the moon be no more. Amen.

I beg you to send a copy of this missive to every community in the cities and hamlets, in order to strengthen the people in their faith and to put them on their feet. Read it at public gatherings and

in private, and you will thus become a public benefactor. Take adequate precautions lest its contents be divulged to the Gentiles by an evil person and mishap overtake us (God spare us therefrom). When I began writing this letter I had some misgivings about it, but they were overruled by my conviction that the public welfare takes precedence over one's personal safety. Moreover, I am sending it to a personage such as you, "and the secret of the Lord may be entrusted to those who fear Him" (Ps. 25:14). Our sages, the successors of the prophets, assured us that persons engaged in a religious mission will meet with no disaster (Pesahim 8b). What more important religious mission is there than this. Peace be to all Israel. Amen.